

# **Theory and Social Problems**

**SOCIOLOGY 403: SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

# **What is a Theory?**

**“A theory is a system of interconnected abstractions or ideas that condenses and organizes knowledge about the social world. It is a compact way to think of the social world.”**

**-W. Lawrence Neuman, 2007**

***Basics of Social Research***

# **Theory**

**Essentially, a theory is an explanation.**

**A theory links concepts to help us understand a social phenomenon.**

**For example, a theory might help us understand how a social problem develops, why certain behaviors become social problems, or what factors make an issue a bigger or smaller social problem.**

# Modeling Theory

## MODEL OF COLLEGE WITHDRAWAL

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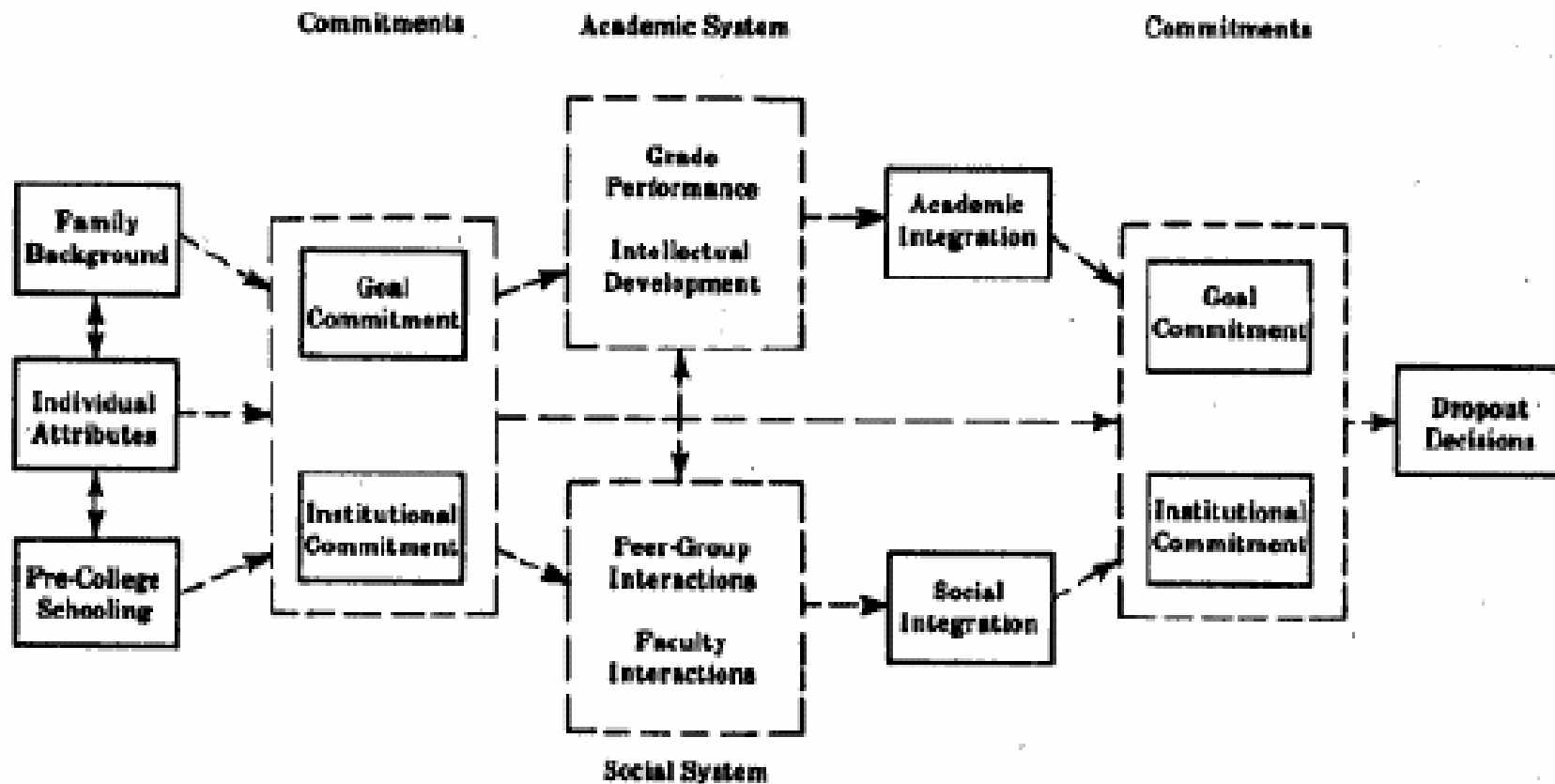


Figure 1: Tinto's (1975) Theoretical Model of College Withdrawal

# **Modeling Theory**

**Let's see if we can develop a model that explains smoking.**

**We want to answer the question:**

**Why is it that people take up smoking?**

# Linear Model

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \dots + \beta_k x_k + \varepsilon_i$$

where:

$y$  = dependent variable

$x$  = independent (predictor) variables

$\beta$  = regression coefficient

$k$  = total no. of independent variables

$\varepsilon_i$  = residual error term

# **Modeling Theory**

**Let's consider smoking  
as a social problem.**

**Let's address a linear model  
addressing this question:**

**What factors affect whether  
a community will adopt  
a smoking ban?**

# Role of Theory in Understanding Society

